

The challenges of an engagement between the African Union and the UN Security Council¹

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Abstract

Since the 1960s and during the initial decades of the United Nations (UN) Africa has always had great representation inside the General Assembly. Besides the numerical advantage of Africa, the ties between the continent and the UN grew to be very specific and assumed multidimensional aspects due to the various issues related to the constant conflicts and social crises inside African territories. However, this engagement presents several complex aspects, including international, regional, and local issues. The engagement of Africa with the UN Security Council is based on two main pillars: conflict resolution and the claim of representation in a reformed Council. The problems related to these pillars are summarized in three broad categories considered problematic for this interaction: capacity, regional integration, and the political relation between the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council. The colonial background of the African continent left deep scars for its countries. Currently, Africa is the continent with the second biggest economic inequality in the world, besides the fact that its countries are hardly able to mobilize their forces to control domestic issues. Therefore, the capacity for collaboration and cooperation with UN forces is much reduced. At the same time, the continent was never united completely under a consensus and real integration, despite the existence of the AU – the former Organization of African Unity (OAU). African countries have been divided between two opposites: the need for integration and the defence of sovereignty. This division harmed even the African claims for fair representation inside the UNSC. This work intends to develop a discussion on how these problems must be overcome for successful engagement between the African continent and the UN Security Council.

Keywords: International Organizations; Political Sciences; United Nations; African Union; Challenges; Capacity; Regional Integration; Peace and security.

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Introduction

Africa is the continent with the highest number of recognized states in the world and represents 15% of the global population. These characteristics present endless possibilities for growth. However, despite its great potential, Africa suffers with several challenges.

Following World War II the process of decolonization was responsible for the emergence of new countries and international actors. Slowly, Africa became a free continent and its countries started to figure as international actors. On the other hand, the internal issues caused by European colonization were detrimental to the African post-colonial history for many years.² The incautious formation of the African territories by the colonizers established a time bomb of miscellaneous tribes and artificial borders. According to Solomon:³

The most obvious legacy of colonial rule was the division of Africa between the European powers into modern states through agreements ratified at the 1884–85 Berlin Conference (and after), resulting in an uncomfortable fit for Africa's 3 315 ethnic groups within Africa's current 54 'nation-states'.

The conflicts generated as a result thereof were not evident during the period of the Cold War, but became ostensible during the 1990s and are still ravaging most of the continent today.

In 1963, African countries came together with the aim of uniting forces to reach the same objective - the development and welfare of African countries - and created the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which, years later, at the beginning of the 21st century, was replaced by the Organization of African Unity (AU). Even though Africa has figured as one of the main groups inside the United Nations (UN) and some of its countries have been some of the founders of the organization, the necessity for a regional organization still remained. As international actors, the African states assumed an active position since the end of European decolonization.

The African governments understood the necessity of deep international engagement. In this sense, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and its responsibility to maintain international peace and security always

2 R Wisniewski, "Regional integration or regionalization in Africa", *Revolutions*, 2(1), 2014, p. 334.

3 H Solomon, "African solutions to Africa's problems? African approaches to peace, security and stability", *Scientia Militaria*, 43(1), 2015, p. 48.

represented important mechanisms to Africa.⁴ During the final decade of the 20th century the Council had to deal with several conflicts, most of them in Africa: 1990 saw the beginning of conflicts in Liberia while, in 1991, the collapse of Somalia began. The UNSC was sorely tested in 1994 by the Rwandan genocide which then spilled over into Zaire. The year 1998 marked the beginning of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, amongst others.⁵ Other than this, the Security Council also had responsibilities in placing sanctions on Somalia and Eritrea (1992), Libya (1992), Angola (1993), and Liberia (1995).⁶

Therefore, it is important to analyse how Africa engages with the UNSC and which challenges are involved in this work, trying to present possible solutions for these problems. Initially, this article offers a brief presentation of the relations between the UN and the AU. Later on, the analysis covers the evolution of conflict in the international scene and how this evolution was fundamental for the establishment of the recent pillars of engagement between both institutions. Importantly, the main challenges related to the UN-AU interaction – the lack of capacity, the difficulties of regional integration in Africa, and the relation between the AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) and the UNSC – are also discussed. Finally, the evolution of this engagement and possible conclusions and solutions are presented.

The United Nations and the African Union

Africa has been present in the UN since the inception of the organization. Liberia, Ethiopia, and South Africa, for example, signed the UN Charter in 1945 at the very act of the institution's foundation and are considered original members of the UN. Years later, during the 1960s, Africa, together with Asia, assumed the position of largest regional group inside the UN. Nowadays, the African continent has 54 recognized states and represents around 30% of the total membership of the UN at the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

After the decolonization process, African states understood the poor situation of their territories as new-born states and the necessity of international

4 J Campbell, "Africa on the UN Security Council", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 9 October 2014 (available at <http://blogs.cfr.org/campbell/2014/10/09/africa-on-the-un-security-council/>, accessed, 19 September 2016).

5 V Hawkins, *The silence of the Security Council: Conflict and peace enforcement in the 1990s* (Firenze, European Press Academic Publishing, 2004).

6 UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Sanctions Committees* (available at <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/>, accessed, 19 September 2016).

interaction to promote their development. Participation inside of UN procedures and decisions has always been a very significant activity for the countries in Africa. The UN represented, from the beginning, an arena of growth and international support for underdeveloped and sub-developed countries. Simultaneously, the mechanisms of conflict resolution inside the UN – the UNSC – represented hope for these countries to solve its internal and regional controversies.

In 1963, inspired by the evolution of the international arena to a constant interaction between strong actors and realizing its power in numbers, the African countries created their first great regional organization, the already mentioned OAU. For the first time, most of the continent was united inside an organization that aimed to represent exclusively the interests of the region. Again, as mentioned before, the OAU was replaced by the AU in 2001.

African countries were always active inside the UN; the continent and the institution always had a multidimensional relationship, addressing a number of different issues through several mechanisms.⁷ However, Africa was initially not well organized as a regional group. The OAU either did not have enough power or could not represent the continent powerfully enough. Most of the African states used to act individually or connected to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Therefore, the AU replaced an organization which was considered dysfunctional, and assumed the international representation of the continent's common goals. Although Morocco never officially joined the group, the entire continent started to work together with the AU towards common objectives.⁸

The resolution of conflicts in the region was also assumed by the AU. Accordingly, to the AU Constitutive Act:⁹

The Union shall function with the following principles: ... (h) the right to intervene in a Member State pursuant of a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

The institution then created the AU PSC that started operating in 2003. The Council established the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)

7 PD Williams & SA Derso, "Saving strangers and neighbors: Advancing UN-AU Cooperation on peace operations", *International Peace Institute*, New York, February 2015, p. 3.

8 UN Official, interview, MMBL Silva (Postdoctoral Fellow, UFS, Department of Political Studies and Governance), 10 September 2015.

9 AU Constitutive Act, Article 4, p. 7.

and determined the structures, objectives, principles, and values for conflict resolution inside the continent. According to Loun-Vaudran, the activity of the AU PSC, together with the African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), has been outstanding in mediating conflicts during the last few years.¹⁰

Basically, the AU PSC assumed a regional position very similar to the one represented by the UNSC. Both Councils have the responsibility of establishing peace and security, especially as conflict mediators for the Member States.

However, despite the similar objectives, it is important to highlight the different dimensions of the UN – a global institution – and the AU – a regional organization. Comparing both institutions in a general and unconscious way would be a concrete example of the expression “comparing oranges and apples”. While the UN covers matters related to the 194 states in the world, the AU limits itself to its 54 continental members. And, in a very hierarchal way, the Charter of the UN makes this differentiation clear. Chapter VIII of the UN Charter separates any regional organization from the global organization, creating different levels for these institutions. It establishes that no regional organizations can act towards enforcement actions without the authorization of the UNSC, thus making the UN superior above all others.¹¹

The clear separation imposed by the 8th chapter of the Charter had a very specific aim. It was important for the UNSC to keep the control of conflict resolution processes inside the UNSC chamber during the Cold War. However, after the end of this period, the very concept of conflict changed and the UN had to rethink its strategy.¹² However, the UN remains quite careful to say that it is not a subsidiary relationship; they cooperate as consultants only, because the UNSC strongly defends its right to secure international peace and security.¹³

The evolution of conflict

Africa has hosted most of the recent conflicts in the world and, between them, some of the longest-running wars; the continent has experienced a total

10 L Loun-Vaudran, “African-unity: How far have we come?”, *ISS Today*, 19 May 2015, p. 1.

11 UN Charter, Chapter VIII, Art. 53: “... no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council”.

12 UN Official, interview, MMBL Silva, 10 September 2015.

13 J Cilliers, Executive Director, Head of African Futures & Innovation (Institute for Security Studies – Pretoria), MMBL Silva (Postdoctoral Fellow, UFS, Department of Political Studies and Governance), 18 August 2015.

of 85 coups d'état as well as 45 civil wars in 95 conflicts between 1945 and 2000.¹⁴ After the end of the Cold War, specifically, the concept of conflict evolved and assumed a multidimensional perspective. Suddenly, conflict resolution was no longer about military intervention only, but also about humanitarian aid, politics, social impact, etc.

During the 1990s, regional instability in Africa increased and activity related to the continent's issues became intense inside the UNSC. In 1994 Rwanda marked the transformation of conflict for the African continent. The states realized that conflict had abandoned an inter-state dimension, becoming much more complex and permeating society.¹⁵ Instead of national armies facing off in a conventional concept of war, the current situation in Africa is characterized by civil wars, coups, insurgencies, and terrorism.¹⁶

Although the last few years were marked by a reduction of the number of interstate skirmishes when compared to the previous decades, armed insurgencies and civil wars continue to be the most common form of conflict in Africa.¹⁷ According to Solomon, Africa turned the classical security dilemma upside down, establishing a framework where domestic order and international threat were replaced by domestic threat and international order.¹⁸

Studies point to the fact that the African situation is mostly connected to the unconsolidated aspect of governance. Although the interstate wars, considered more deadly, decreased, political conflicts are widespread. And, following the population growth, the competition for natural resources caused by the climate change will increase the tension in some regions of the continent.¹⁹

Therefore, the improvement of an interaction with the UN, and especially the UNSC, became an important matter in Africa. The support to address these issues assumed a great meaning to the African territories and its societies.

14 H Solomon, "African solutions to Africa's problems? ...", *Scientia Militaria*, 43(1), 2015, p. 47.

15 UN Official, interview, MMBL Silva (Postdoctoral Fellow, UFS, Department of Political Studies and Governance), 10 September 2015.

16 Institute for Security Studies, "Change of tone in relations between the AU and the UN", *On the agenda*, 23 September 2015, p. 1.

17 H Solomon, "African solutions to Africa's problems? ...", *Scientia Militaria*, 43(1), 2015, p. 49.

18 H Solomon, "African solutions to Africa's problems? ...", *Scientia Militaria*, 43(1), 2015, p. 55.

19 J Cilliers, "Africa's conflict burden in a global context", *ISS Paper 273*, October 2014, p. 15.

Pillars of engagement

With the evolution of conflict and the constant increase of tension in some regions, the African continent saw the necessity for more action and support from the UN. At the same time, the UN also saw the need for broader participation in conflict resolution from the regional agencies in Africa, especially the AU.

For the last 10 years, the UNSC adopted 362 resolutions regarding African issues, which represent 53% of the total number of resolutions (678) adopted during this period.²⁰ The continent is also the base for 9 of the 16 active Peacekeeping Operations in the world.²¹ Therefore, the geographical and, more importantly, cultural proximity of a regional organization represents an important mechanism in Africa to the Council.

The AU, in this context, also recognized the importance of being a higher representative of African common goals and interests inside the UN. The possibility of bringing solutions to various issues to Africa in a comprehensive way – more in accordance with what African states understand as suitable to their territories, cultural standards, and policies – appeared to be a “perfect match” for the AU Membership and also for Morocco.

The necessary interaction among the institutions, and especially among its Councils, on conflict resolution represents the most important pillar of the engagement between Africa and the UNSC. However, a second pillar can be mentioned in this equation: the African claim of better representation inside the UNSC.

For many years African countries, together with other countries and regions, have been petitioning for fair participation in UNSC decision making procedures. The African common position – the Ezulwini Consensus – was presented in 2005 as a formal document containing the detailed opinion of the countries of the continent on how the Council should be transformed and how Africa, as a majority group inside the UN, should be considered a more relevant actor inside its more important agency.²² This official position, as a pillar of constant engagement between the countries and the UN, highlights the importance of

20 UN Security Council, UN Security Council Resolutions (available at <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/>, accessed, 19 September 2016).

21 United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Current Peacekeeping Operations (available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/current.shtml>, accessed, 19 September 2016).

22 African Union, “The common African position on the proposed reform of the United Nations: ‘The Ezulwini Consensus’”, Executive Council, 7th Extraordinary session, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, 7-8 March 2005.

Africa as a regional group, the constant interaction between the UNSC and the continent, and the necessity of providing the region with a higher level of participation in a decision making process that is largely related to Africa.²³

However, despite the clear basis of an engagement between Africa and the UNSC, both institutions still have a number of challenges to be overcome before a functional engagement takes place, as will be seen in the discussion to follow.

Challenges

In many ways Africa represents the most challenging region in the world. UN action in Africa faces a series of difficulties and, at the same time, the AU and its members also face several internal obstacles.²⁴ Therefore, perfectly functional interaction between the continent and the international organization's Security Council is undermined, largely by these impasses.

The main challenges for the interaction between the African region and the UNSC are mainly threefold, namely capacity, regional integration, and the political relations between the UNSC and the AU PSC.²⁵ These challenges cover issues on different levels of the social organization, from domestic matters to regional and international issues.

Capacity

There is an acute lack of capacity among African states. Most of it is related to issues of political stability, social matters, and economic strength. The formation and consolidation of states in Africa is an ongoing process and the conversion of capabilities into projection of power is limited.²⁶ These problems make the support to the AU and the action towards the UNSC insufficient, transforming the AU into an institution with weak capabilities, bureaucratically, logistically, and financially.²⁷

23 MMBL Silva, *Spoiler or reformer? The uniting for Consensus group and UN Security Council reform* (Osaka University, Osaka, 2014), pp. 63-66.

24 R Wisniewski, "Regional integration or regionalization in Africa", *Revolutions*, 2(1), 2014, p. 338.

25 A Boutellis & PD Williams, "Peace operations, the African Union, and the United Nations: Towards more effective partnership", *International Peace Institute*, New York, April 2013, p. 13.

26 J Cilliers, J Schunemann & JD Moyer, "Power and influence in Africa: Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Africa", *ISS African Futures Paper 14*, March 2015, p. 3.

27 A Boutellis & PD Williams, "Peace operations, the African Union, and the United Nations: Towards more effective partnership", *International Peace Institute*, New York, April 2013, p. 1.

As mentioned, the very formation of the African states was not ideal and generated several consequences for the entire continent. Some characteristics of the continent directly influence their capacity to act promptly on international matters. Mesfin highlighted the following very important issues:²⁸

You can imagine: More than 50 African seats, from different backgrounds, colonized by the French, the Portuguese, the British; most of them have very artificial borders, most of them are actually gripped within a conflict, with very weak institutions. They don't have some sort of democratic culture with which they can actually get their population to get involved in the politics, in the economics of their countries. These countries are very much dependent on external countries for their economies; they rely on external companies and are very weak economically.

Reflecting this, the capacity of the AU to act and establish its policies, as an institution constituted by member states, is tied to the quality of the governance inside these members.²⁹ At the same time, the AU is still very dependent on foreign donations, which makes the organization very vulnerable and tied to the obligation of following its donors' priorities.

Despite the fact that studies currently point to very significant growth in Africa over the next decades, raising its countries' capabilities from 9% of the global power to 11% in 2040, the continent is not like a single sovereign country, nor a supranational organization.³⁰ It needs deep investment in the improvement of its 54 countries' capacity, including a matter of establishing stable and functional governances inside each territory.

As its members, the African regional organizations – the AU and the RECs – will also need to organize their policies in a way that promotes growth and independence from external actors. Even in the security sector the need exists for improvements in the institutions' capacity of bringing together its members under the same goals and to facilitate rapid responses to crises. According to Adebajo, the peace and security mechanisms in Africa also need “to ensure that the continent does not keep relying on self-interested external powers for its security”.³¹

28 B Mesfin, Senior Researcher (Institute for Security Studies – Addis Ababa), interview, MMBL Silva (Postdoctoral Fellow, UFS, Department of Political Studies and Governance), 9 September 2015.

29 R Wisniewski, “Regional integration or regionalization in Africa”, *Revolutions*, 2(1), 2014, p. 337.

30 J Cilliers, J Schunemann & JD Moyer, “Power and influence in Africa...”, *ISS African Futures Paper 14*, March 2015, p. 4.

31 A Adebajo, “UN peacekeeping and the quest for a Pax Africana”, *Current History*, May 2014, p. 184.

However, this kind of expansion, improvement of capacity, and development also depend on another important factor that fails to be reached by African countries: regional integration, with the expansion of a unified Africa still highly unlikely, even with some advances in terms of integration.³²

Regional integration

Regional integration is an important advance in terms of regional representation and development. As the unification of countries in an international organization represents a better opportunity of achieving important objectives, the integration between countries in the same region is equally positive for the establishment and achievement of common goals.

Although African countries claim to have a common and integrated position regarding the desired objectives of the continent, there is constant disjunction between a Pan-African ideology of support and the defence of sovereignty. Pan-Africanism assumes a dependence on the context in which it is addressed; it may be of collective interest or not depending on whether or not it competes with the national interest of individual states.³³ This fact makes real regional integration almost impossible and affects all the potential of regional action. As Adebajo mentions, Africa needs to improve its regional pillars and reduce the dependence on external actors.³⁴ However, at the same time, plans for integration have been so lost in official rhetoric and bureaucracy that hardly any progress has been made.³⁵

Discourses based on a Pan-African concept, trying to bring together the entire continent in a singular identity, date from the 19th and 20th centuries; these debates, however, were not able to instigate the formation of an actual society of sovereign states.³⁶ As Cilliers mentions:³⁷

For decades there has been a lot of talk about African political integration, but it generally remains rhetoric. Only recently has Africa embarked on

32 J Cilliers, J Schunemann & JD Moyer, "Power and influence in Africa...", *ISS African Futures Paper 14*, March 2015, p. 4.

33 S Graham, Senior Lecturer (University of Johannesburg – Johannesburg), interview, MMBL Silva (Postdoctoral Fellow, UFS, Department of Political Studies and Governance), 20 July 2015.

34 A Adebajo, "UN peacekeeping and the quest for a Pax Africana", *Current History*, May 2014, p. 184.

35 L Loun-Vaudran, "African-unity: How far have we come?", *ISS Today*, 19 May 2015, p. 1.

36 H Solomon, "African solutions to Africa's problems? ...", *Scientia Militaria*, 43(1), 2015, p. 58.

37 J Cilliers, Executive Director, Head of African Futures & Innovation (Institute for Security Studies – Pretoria), interview, MMBL Silva (Postdoctoral Fellow, UFS, Department of Political Studies and Governance), 18 August 2015.

building regional infrastructure and establishing the means through which African countries can trade with one another, so that they can translate the ambition of regional integration into reality.

The actual problem with regional integration in Africa is mostly related to a cultural and historical defence of sovereignty. Although African states understand the importance of working with their neighbours, there is always a need to affirm the integrity of its territories and the strength of its own culture. Despite the fact that most of the territories in Africa are occupied by a number of different – and sometimes historically rivalling – ethnic groups, there is a strong sense of patriotism and identity among the population, even considering that the ability of defining a national interest is also variable among different states. The efforts to create a real African union exist, but the divisions among heads of state largely and continually hamper these efforts.³⁸

The representatives of Africa inside the UNSC – two non-permanent seats with a two year term each – are a good example of how African countries work together. The ideal of working in harmony cannot prevent each individual government from giving priority to their own individual interests. The African member states inside the Council often do not adhere to the continent's position, voting in accordance with their national interests and not in accordance with the formal AU position.³⁹

The different interests of these states directly affect the capacity of aligned agendas and establishing common goals, although many advances have already been made.⁴⁰ Members of the AU are working very hard on conflict resolution and crisis management, and the compromise of the African countries was bigger over the last few years. The international organizations created on the continent were definitely a turning point for Africa.

However, as studies currently indicate, the EU is still the model of institution emulated by the African organizations, and its structure of sovereignty transference is very complicated in Africa. As Wisniewski states, African countries are not open to transferring their sovereign capacities to supranational bodies and it facilitates the understanding that, if this system was unsuccessful in Europe, it will not easily be achieved in African organizations.⁴¹

38 L Loun-Vaudran, "African-unity: How far have we come?", *ISS Today*, 19 May 2015, p. 1.

39 J Cilliers, Executive Director, Head of African Futures & Innovation, interview, MMBL Silva, 18 August 2015.

40 R Wisniewski, "Regional integration or regionalization in Africa", *Revolutions*, 2(1), 2014, p. 338.

41 R Wisniewski, "Regional integration or regionalization in Africa", *Revolutions*, 2(1), 2014, p. 333.

The framework of regional security is also largely affected by the African lack of regional integration. There is a clear security complex in the continent, where a problem within a country will most probably affect another country in something similar to a domino effect.⁴²

Even inside the debates for a possible reform of the UNSC, there is inflexibility by the African members, together with an evident failure to reach a common position during the debates and negotiations with like-minded groups, even about the creation of new permanent seats in the Council – the most important topic of the reform for Africa.⁴³

The Ezulwini Consensus, as mentioned before, was presented in 2005 as the official and documented common position of Africa inside the UN. African UN members emphatically defend this common position; it is inflexible and no other option will be accepted by the continent's countries. However, inside the African group there is no agreement on how the same position would be put into action. The African common position formally bounds the AU members, but it does not mean that a real common understanding of how to solve African issues exists.

Loun-Vaudran presents a possible beginning for an African transformation towards a more integrated region:⁴⁴

Infrastructure linking the continent and enabling the free movement of goods and people is a crucial first step towards continental integration. Strong leadership by committed Pan-Africanists, not only African leaders, is however also needed to revive the idea of true African unity.

The differences and disconnections among African countries point, as mentioned above, to a weak ability to compromise and establish common policies. Therefore, this characteristic is also reflected by the continent in terms of inter-institutional interaction. The differences and difficulties among the AU PSC and the UNSC are a determinant challenge for the engagement between the African continent and the Council.

42 B Mesfin, Senior Researcher, interview, MMBL Silva, 9 September 2015.

43 PD Williams & SA Derso, "Saving strangers and neighbors: Advancing UN-AU Cooperation on peace operations", *International Peace Institute*, New York, February 2015, p.13,

44 L Loun-Vaudran, "African-unity: How far have we come?", *ISS Today*, 19 May 2015, p. 1.

UNSC – AU PSC political relations

The political interaction between the Councils of the AU and the UN has been a problem for the functionality of this alliance. There is a lack of proper engagement between the AU PSC and the UNSC, characterized by many factors.

The main obstacles of this relation are a certain lack of trust between the institutions, the different bureaucratic cultures and working methods inside the Councils and the lack of agreement between both institutions on how to access crises, the lack of agenda coordination and regular communication, and, finally, the lack of strong capacity and representation of the AU in New York.

The different dimensions of both organizations, and especially the existence of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, complicate the political relations between the two bodies. The two organizations understand the section of the document in divergent ways. As the UNSC sometimes simultaneously reads the Charter literally and claims its exclusive rights over international peace and security, the AU PSC takes offense for the depreciation represented by the chapter. Both Councils must overcome these differences at a political level to promote better interaction among them.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the functioning of the AU PSC and the working methods of the UNSC are very different. In Addis Ababa, representation is directly connected to the governments of the member states and to the African culture in general. African ambassadors have to account directly to their Ministries of Foreign Affairs and their presidents, who are sometimes involved in the very conflicts the Council is dealing with.⁴⁶ The dimension of the UN establishes a bigger distance between most of the UNSC members and the crises “on the ground”, which gives the ambassadors more freedom and another perception of the conflicts. Therefore, the way of addressing international conflicts in both institutions is divergent.

At the same time, another issue that makes these differences even more evident is the very limited communication between both bodies. The AU PSC does not consult the UNSC directly; there are annual meetings between the members in New York and Addis Ababa, but most of the exchange of

45 A Boutellis & PD Williams, “Peace operations, the African Union, and the United Nations...”, *International Peace Institute*, New York, April 2013, p. 14.

46 B Mesfin, Senior Researcher, interview, MMBL Silva, 9 September 2015.

information or alerts takes place through informal consultations with UNSC members – the so called coffee diplomacy – or through letters sent to the Secretary General asking to bring any important matter to the attention of the UNSC.⁴⁷

Moreover, a factor that strongly influences the relation between Africa and the UNSC is the lack of proper representation in New York. Most of the African missions to the UN are very small and unable to participate actively in the debates. There is a restricted number of delegates for the great number of daily events inside the institution. The same can be said for representation at the AU. Despite the tremendous effort and the high quality of the diplomats involved in the representation of African countries, the capacity of the majority of the missions is very limited. Only Nigeria and South Africa have strong missions inside the UN. These limitations automatically hamper the possibility of more engagement between the continent and the international organization.⁴⁸

The challenges related to the political interaction between both Councils probably have simpler solutions among all the issues that influence an engagement between Africa and the UNSC. The alignment of some bureaucratic procedures and the compromise on actual alliance on conflict resolution would be a great advance to solve this issue.

Work in progress

With the constant crises in Africa, the understanding of a necessary exchange between Africa and the UN is currently widespread. There is a clear effort to advance towards a more functional and productive engagement, especially between the AU PSC and the UNSC. The improvement of this interaction has been a work in process since the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), in 2004.

The relationship between the institutions has indeed improved. The focus previously secured by the UN was mainly connected to improvement of the AU's capacity, which created disagreements between the institutions. The AU members felt offended by the characterization that the expression

⁴⁷ UN Official, interview, MMBL Silva, 10 September 2015.

⁴⁸ Information collected *in loco*, at the UN, October 2015.

“capacity building” attributed to the organization and to the continent.⁴⁹ Recently, the focus changed from mere “capacity building” to the exchange of valuable information on common issues.⁵⁰ Both institutions realized that the challenges involving peace and security in Africa are numerous and that it is impossible for an organization to cope with all of them alone.⁵¹

Both the AU and the UN have advanced in creating mechanisms of interaction over the years. Although most of them were initiated by the UN, the collaboration between the two institutions made this achievement possible. According to Boutellis, both Councils are committed to the creation of various mechanisms of coordination and the support of the principle of “non-indifference” established by the AU.⁵² The understanding of the importance of this interaction is justified by Solomon’s statement:⁵³

The proximity of sub-regional organisations to the conflict provides them with a better understanding of its dynamics, key players and context-specific management and resolution options.

In 2004 the AU created the APSA, aiming to regulate conflict resolution inside the continent and establishing a better mechanism of response to crises. The APSA was an important advance in terms of the infrastructure of conflict management in Africa and created institutions to address all the challenges involved in the process.⁵⁴

Despite the subsequent disagreement on the terminology, also in 2004, the presentation of the “Ten years capacity building programme for the AU” by the former Secretary General Kofi Annan also represented another mechanism towards an improvement of the relations between the AU and the UN. In the same year, the UNSC members also presented more mechanisms to bring both institutions together, the EU African Peace Facility and the G8++ Global Peace Operation.

49 UN Official, interview, MMBL Silva, 10 September 2015.

50 Institute for Security Studies, “Change of tone in relations between the AU and the UN”, *On the agenda*, 23 September 2015, p. 1.

51 A Boutellis & PD Williams, “Peace operations, the African Union, and the United Nations...”, *International Peace Institute*, New York, April 2013, p. 4.

52 A Boutellis & PD Williams, “Peace Operations, the African Union, and the United Nations...”, *International Peace Institute*, New York, April 2013, p. 1.

53 H Solomon, “African Solutions to Africa’s Problems? African Approaches to Peace, Security and Stability”, *Scientia Militaria*, 43(1), 2015, p. 67.

54 A Boutellis & PD Williams, “Peace Operations, the African Union, and the United Nations...”, *International Peace Institute*, New York, April 2013, p. 4.

In 2007, the AU PSC and the UNSC established regular meetings between their members. During the following year, 2008, the UNSC approved Resolution 1809 that reinforced the importance of interaction between the UN and regional organizations regarding conflict resolution. According to the document, the UNSC is committed to take steps towards the improvement of its relationship with regional organizations, especially the AU. The Council also highlights the importance of the developments related to conflict resolution and the cooperation between actors. Finally, it also mentions the necessity of building capacity for the AU secretariat as a way of improving the management for the solution of crises.⁵⁵

Later, in 2010, the UNSC offered a training package to improve the qualification of the PSC secretariat. That same year saw the inception of collaborative field missions, bringing together UN and AU forces, and saw the creation of the Joint Task Force.

The most important mechanism of engagement between the UN and the AU was also created in 2010. The United Nations Office for the African Union (UNOAU) was established in Addis Ababa. The office currently consists of 70 people and its officials are always present at the AU, participating in negotiations and gathering information.

Following the improvements of the interaction mechanisms between both institutions, the UNOAU was established as a mediator between the UN in New York and the AU headquarter in Addis Ababa. The intermediation is realized as a “transmission of versions”; the office is responsible for telling the AU ambassadors in Ethiopia about the UN’s point of view on certain issues and, at the same time, tell the representatives in the UN how the AU faces these matters.⁵⁶ As mentioned before, the work of the UNOAU represents one of the greatest advances in the engagement between the African continent and the UN, especially the UNSC.

In 2012, the UNSC reiterated the commitment presented in 2008 with the previously mentioned Resolution 1809. Resolution 2033 came as another official step taken by the UNSC towards a better relationship between the Council and regional organizations, once again highlighting engagement with the AU. The document mentions again that the UNSC “reiterates the

55 United Nations, Resolution 1809 (2008), 16 April 2008 (available at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1809\(2008\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1809(2008))), accessed, 22 June 2016).

56 UN Official, interview, MMBL Silva, 10 September 2015.

importance of establishing a more effective relationship between the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council.”⁵⁷

The UNSC approved 64 resolutions in 2015 and, so far, 33 resolutions in 2016. From a total of 97 resolutions over the last few months, 70 revolved around African issues and issues that directly affect the continent.⁵⁸ Most of these resolutions were connected to work in the field realized by regional organizations and the AU. An example thereof is Resolution 2225 (2015), about children and armed conflicts, that share subject with a number of events and debates promoted by sub-regional organizations and the AU. The AU PSC held its 597th meeting on the same theme around one month before the approval of the UNSC resolution to debate the protection of children’s rights during conflicts.⁵⁹ It clearly shows improved interaction and exchange between the organizations.

The work in progress - to bring together the AU PSC and the UNSC in common approaches to African crises – has recently shown significant advances. At the same time, the UN recognized the importance of the AU for the continent, and the AU assumed its dependence on the global dimension of the UN.

Conclusions and recommendations

The chair of the AU, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, says that “beggars cannot be choosers” and that the AU needs help from external actors, especially the UN.⁶⁰ However, it is important to highlight that the inverse way is also very significant, and that the UN needs the local support of the AU to be successful on its actions on the continent. The cooperation between both organizations is vital for the resolution of crises in Africa.

With the analysis of the current situation inside African countries, there is a clear understanding of the precarious condition of economy, governance,

57 United Nations, Resolution 2033 (2012), 12 January 2012 (available at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2033\(2012\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2033(2012))), accessed, 22 June 2016).

58 Information available at <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/>.

59 African Union, “Press statement of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 597th meeting on the theme: ‘Children in armed conflicts in Africa with particular focus on protecting schools from attacks during armed conflict’”, 10 May 2016 (available at <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/press-statement-of-the-peace-and-security-council-psc-of-the-african-union-au-at-its-597th-meeting-on-the-theme-children-in-armed-conflicts-in-africa-with-particular-focus-on-protecting-schools-from-attacks-during-armed-conflict>), accessed, 22 June 2016).

60 UN Official, interview, MMBL Silva, 10 September 2015.

and infrastructure. Africa is the continent with the second highest level of economic inequality in the world after Latin America and the richest portion of the populations capture the largest part of the income in all of its countries.⁶¹

The challenges in Africa tend to be very complex and, together with the large lack of capacity on the continent, a lack of compromise between countries is also very harmful to the development of these societies and the solution of conflicts inside their territories. Complications on regional and domestic levels are also a threat to the engagement of the continent with international organizations, especially the UN.

Moreover, the difference of dimension between the regional and global levels is another problem, but simultaneously a solution to the engagement between Africa and the UN. At the same time that the difference between the AU and the UN is a difficulty for the political relations among their agencies, the proximity of the regional organization is an important advantage: to bring about better actuation of both institutions on the resolution of matters inside the continent.

The issue of capacity demands the largest local effort, beyond the external support received by the African continent. The development of African countries would require a change in their domestic stability, political leadership, and governance.⁶² Initially, the external support could be used for an internal improvement of infrastructure, for then internal transformation takes place. Therefore, the states would be able to develop themselves and produce their own economic resources, decreasing the current dependence on international benefactors.

Regional integration also demands more attention and compromise, but on an international level. African countries need to find common ground between the defence of sovereignty and Pan-African integration. Most of the countries in Africa share the same domestic challenges, but it is very difficult to bring them together to fight these issues. The governments should make all possible efforts towards abandoning, to a certain extent, the exclusive defence of individual interests and commit themselves to a group effort that would be valuable to every country. The understanding that shared challenges can

61 M Mubila, L Lannes & MSB Aissa, "Briefing Note 5: Income inequality in Africa", *Briefing notes for the African Development Bank group's long-term strategy*, March 2012, p. 2.

62 J Cilliers, J Schunemann & JD Moyer, "Power and influence in Africa...", *ISS African Futures Paper 14*, March 2015, p. 25.

be overcome with shared solutions is an important solution for the lack of support among African countries.

At the same time, the work to improve the political relations between the AU PSC and the UNSC must go on. The integration of both Councils under common policies and the alignment of their agendas on African issues would represent a better future for crisis management on the continent. Better coordination between both institutions would guarantee the development of Africa's capacity to address issues and increase the participation of African countries in the decision making process. The involvement of African countries in the decisions made about their own continent would add value to the policies enforced by the UN inside their territories.

Possible solutions for the main challenges faced during engagement between Africa and the UNSC, despite the complexity of its enforcement, are easily identified. Capacity, regional integration, and AU PSC-UNSC's political relations are not impossible issues to be resolved, but demand compromise and action from AU and UN member states.